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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000747

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS CONTINUE THOUGH CROWD PALTRY

REF: TBILISI 735

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The protests waned further on Wednesday, April 15 with only an estimated 1500-2000 protesters in front of Parliament. A small number of protesters (20-30) remained at the Presidential Residence. Approximately 30-40 protesters gathered at the Public Broadcasters building but the cages (simulated jail cells) which had previously closed the street were moved to the side of the road, allowing traffic to move freely. A group of 300-400 protesters left Parliament at 5 pm intending to block access to the State Chancellery. At 5 pm it began to rain and most of the crowd dispersed. At 6 pm, Embassy Observers estimated 500 protesters in total at all sites. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: While non-parliamentary opposition leaders vow to continue, they struggled to get 2000 protesters into the street in front of Parliament on Wednesday. Speakers looked visibly demoralized and their tactics remain as confused as ever. Forecasts for rain and Orthodox Holy Week holidays are sure to further limit the number of protesters over the next few days. While it is too early to predict the impending end of the protests as a number of non-parliamentary leaders say they are determined to continue indefinitely, it seems clear to virtually all that protests are losing momentum. End Comment.

Protest Numbers Minimal - MOIA Calm

¶3. (C) Observers put Wednesday's crowd between 1500-2000, which reached its peak at roughly 4:30 pm. A portion of the crowd (300-400) moved to block the State Chancery building at about 5 pm. A small number of protesters remained overnight at the Presidential Residence (20-30) in the 10-12 tents that have been set up there. Four cages were also placed in front of the Presidential Residence. Eight cages (simulated jails) remained at the Public Broadcasters building but had been moved to the side in order to allow free traffic flow. A small number of protesters (30-40) were there, mostly inside the cages. Rain began at about 5 pm and considerably diminished the crowd to the point where Embassy observers put the numbers of protesters at approximately 500 at all sites. The protesters were mostly middle aged males. MOIA representatives told Poloff that they expected no violence and believed the protests were losing momentum. MOIA representatives suspected the decision to block only the Chancellery was a pragmatic one because of its close proximity to Parliament and the limited amount of protesters available rather than any shift in strategic thinking. Some leaders have indicated that protests will continue through Orthodox Holy Week though others have said there will be no protests during the holidays. (Embassy Comment: We believe the non-parliamentary opposition has no overall strategy to

handle protests if any during Holy Week and the widely inconsistent comments given about this represent the lack of consensus. End Comment.)

Speakers Dour - Though Rhetoric Still Harsh

¶4. (C) The stage was only about half-full (compared to previous days) of opposition leaders on Wednesday and virtually all the speakers appeared dour in spite of their rhetoric. Salome Zourabichvili, who on April 11 had urged the crowd to block the Marriott so that GoG officials would be unable to speak to the press, said that "dialogue is the language of the devil." Levan Gachechiladze raised a few eyebrows when he declared that Saakashvili was personally responsible for the global economic crisis. Koba Davitashvili declared that "they" would stay indefinitely in front of Parliament, the Presidential Residence, Public Broadcasters building, and the State Chancellery in tents and makeshift cells. Davitashvili later clarified that neither he nor any other of the non-parliamentary opposition leaders would actually be staying in the tents or cages, but the tent and cages would serve as symbolic continual presence.

Attacks Alleged

¶5. (C) A number of individuals have alleged they were targeted and attacked due to their political views. The Ambassador has inquired into every reported case thus far with MOIA, which is responsible for investigating the incidents. The Public Defender's Office has spoken to a number of the alleged victims and remains in contact with the MOIA concerning the cases. The Public Defender's Office told us on April 15 that it does not believe that the attacks are being conducted by the police (septel). (Embassy Comment: Details in each case are still unclear and Post will continue to follow up on each case. Post does not rule out that

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alleged victims may have been targeted by certain UNM supporters, though many cases may be the result of increased criminal activity in Tbilisi. End Comment.)
TEFFT